

The Bayou Review



THE BAYOU REVIEW



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Dedicated  
to Tina Prihoda

## **When I Met The Famous Writer**

*When I met the famous writer,  
I thought I'd walk up and say:  
Help-I need your help.  
You see, I'm not like all the others  
who are lolling at the fringes,  
sipping gin with sideways glances,  
and await a single chance  
to gush and pump your hand  
while you stand basking,  
asking inane questions,  
never hearing, never caring  
for the answers that are tendered  
by those singed-wing moths who flutter  
in confusion all around your glow.  
No, I'm not like them! I can glow,  
I have the spark to be a fire, too,  
and I aspire to have that glow like you,  
but please look at me and not through me,  
please don't try to view me as some  
curious 'B' movie, please don't smile,  
sign your name, glad-hand me,  
or look away.*

*--And please don't say you're glad I came.*

*And then I met the famous writer  
and he looked through me and said:  
"How are you?" and "What's the name?"  
and "Glad you came!" He shook my hand.  
"Help-I need your help," I muttered,  
"Can you tell me: Where's the can?"*

*Ian Edward Dix*

## OLD ROADS

*My father loved old roads, collected them.  
No matter where we traveled, suddenly,  
off we would go, after a nod from him  
to mother, down some rutted lane to see*

*what we could find--a hidden village maps  
had overlooked, ramshackle country stores  
where he'd pull up, buy gingerale, and chat  
with the old men, or better still, explore*

*a river road for two-car ferries that  
we'd take across and back pretending we  
were sailors like his ancestors, Nantucket  
whalers, alert for spouts, for storms; or he*

*would turn around to find a view, a high  
place where a grass-grown wagon path would draw  
us up old rocky hills to open sky,  
the world stretched out and small, unreal, below.*

*Sometimes he took us off to what he knew  
was there: those ancient, empty farms, the barns  
faded and leaning, silent fields, a few  
gravestones under a tree, moss-spotted, worn*

*by bitter weather. Getting out, we'd stand  
holding his hands, I and my sister, calm  
as the yet unborn, listening for the sound  
the long-dead hum to those who follow them.*

Cathy Stern

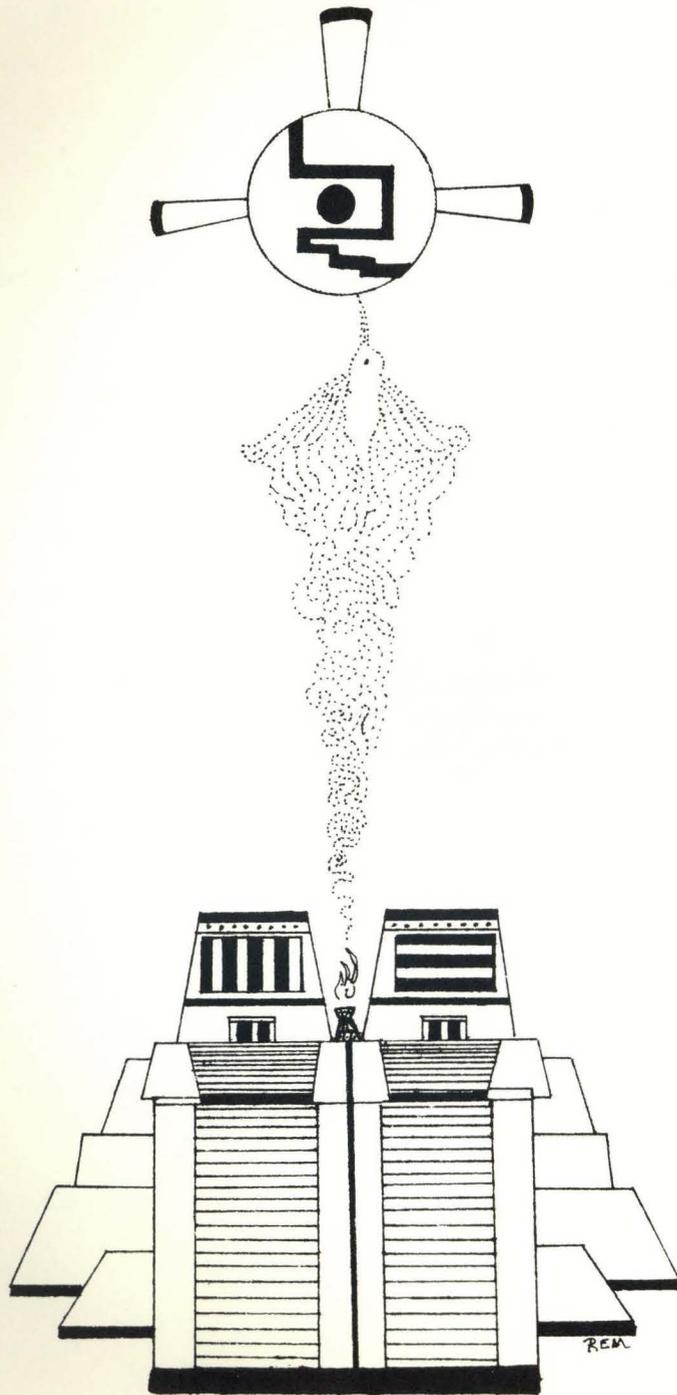
*"We're getting married!" I told my friend,  
whose marriage met a bitter end.  
She rolled her eyes and gave a shrug. "So what?",  
she said, "it's two-to-one that you and he will part, of course, all  
marriages these days spell  
divorce. You mark my words, you'll see the truth, and though I  
know it sounds uncouth, reality is never kind--but good luck,  
kid, you might change your mind."*

*"Impossible!", I interject, "we're in it for life, we've learned  
respect. We're not gonna be like all the rest. We love each other--  
that's manifest!"  
But I stop for a moment and recollect, the letter which his  
mother sent. His oldest sister left her spouse, left behind  
children, sold the house. They seemed so happy, or were we  
blind, or was it just our state of mind?"*

*I won't join the ranks of some of my friends, whose marital  
bliss they failed to defend. I see them feel bitter when ex's are  
mentioned, I'm forced to take sides at divorcee conventions. I  
can't help but feel that they wrote their own endings, soon to be  
in paperback, copyrights pending. It's easy to quit and blame  
one another, divvy up the children and go back to mother. "I'll  
take the Jaguar, you keep the house. Mother was right, I married  
a louse."*

*I guess we're alone to think we'll work it through, to feel that  
occasionally we'll pay our dues. That sometimes we'll argue and  
sometimes we'll cry, and statistics will mock us and challenge  
our pride. And when to my fiance, I show my fear, he touches me  
gently and tells me, "My dear, the world will bear witness to our  
lifetime decreement...by the way, will you sign this pre-nuptial  
agreement?"*

Safrona Renee Jeffries



## ***Intell***

*Back in 1478...*

*When the eagle ate the cactus serpent  
They brought forth...*

*More than metal  
On this historic date...*

*Was when a sun was learned,  
and the dark ages ended*

*Joseph R. Williams*

## To Richard

So you ask for a poem  
from this lost prophet-moth  
in one?

Let me tell you first:  
Let me tell you nought  
at all,  
et al,  
this girl's in fire with you  
oh, trench-tender one.

(smudmanthunderbull)

Can't you see?  
Her moats, your seethe.

Convoluting  
round and  
round and  
round and  
more

I can't tell how enchanted  
poem you so are.

WendyLi

## Cryin' For Stinky-Feet Jessie

Eskey! Esquirosa! That's what everybody at school calls her. Eskey Jesky. Her real name is Jessica Montoya. Her family calls her Jessie. But everybody else calls her Eskey Jesky. That and Stinky-Feet Jessie. And , you know what? She never even cries. It's like she don't even care.

I remember when we were little kids, a couple years ago. We used to go play on the swings at school. First, we'd pump our legs and get goin' fast, and high, 'til the chains would jump. Then, when we were goin' nice and high, we'd start in. Sorta singin', sorta just talkin'. You know? Like when boys are playin' baseball and go, "Hey, batta, batta. Strike one, strike two, strike three, yer out. Hey, batta, batta. Hey, batta, batta." Or like when girls are jumpin' rope and they make up those rhymes? Like that. Well, we always used to go like this when were swingin': "I'm cryin' for Stinky-Feet Jessie. I'm cryin' for Stinky-Feet Jessie." Over and over and over. I don't know why. It don't even make sense, no? And she wasn't even there to hear us. But it made us laugh, anyway.

One day mama hears me and Rosie - that's my little sister - makin' fun of Eskey Jesky. She tells us we shouldn't call her that. "Why not?" we ask. "She is Eskey." And me and Rosie laugh. Mama says we shouldn't use words we don't even understand and call people such names when we don't really know 'em.

So I ask mama, "What does esquirosa mean, anyway?" And she says, "Well, it means sickening. Like something that turns your stomach." And we laugh some more and I say, "Well then, that is the right name for her. She makes everybody sick. Huh, Rosie?" Rosie says yes and both of us wrinkle up our noses like if we smelled spoiled milk or somethin'. And then we laugh.

Mama don't like that and she sends me to the boys' bedroom and Rosie to the girls' bedroom. She tells us not to come out 'til she comes and gets us. "You sit there and think about it," she says. So I sit on the bed 'til I get bored. Then I look out the window awhile 'til that gets boring, too.

Then I see the Spanish Dictionary on top of the chest. My big brother Gilbert uses it for his Spanish Class. He's in high school, you know. I turn to E for esquirosa, just to see if it's a bad word. Why else would Mama be so mad at us? But you know what? There's no such word in the dictionary. I figure it must be a bad word. But then I change my mind 'cause Mama never said nothin' about it bein' dirty or nothin'. And everybody says that word and nobody says nothin' about it bein' a bad word.

But I'm a perty smart kid. That's what my teachers tell me. So I look in the English part under 'S' for sickening and there is a list. Right after "nauseabundo" - I guess that's how you pronounce it - and right before "repugnante." It stat right? Repugnante? But guess what? It isn't *esquiroso*. It's *asqueroso*.

So, I flip back to the Spanish part and look up *asqueroso*. And boy! What a list of words! Nasty! Filthy! Nau-seous- I'm gonna have to look that one up to see how you pronounce it. And there's more. Loathsome and disgusting! Jeez! Poor Jessie! Who started calling her *esquiroso*, anyway?

Then I close the Spanish Dictionary and get the English one. I gotta see how you pronounce that word: nau-se-ous. Then when I find it, I see that it's nau-seous. Two sounds, not three. And then I see the word *nausea*. Hmm. I wonder how you say that in Spanish. So I get the Spanish dictionary and flip to the English part and look up *nausea*.

And there it is: "asco, n.m. nausea; loathsomeness." Boy, somebody must've really hated Jessie to start calling her *Esquiroso*. And then I notice somethin' else about the word "asco." Inside of two curved marks that look like sideways smiles it says "coll." - whatever that means - and then the word "fear." Fear? What does that have to do with nausea?

I wish Mama would come and get me so I could ask her about this. But she takes forever to come back. And all I can think of is *Esquiroso*. "Im cryin' for Stinky-Feet Jessie." And I ask myself, "How come we call her Stinky-Feet Jessie, anyway?" I never noticed no smell on her. Not her feet. Not her armpits. Nothin'.

And then I start to think some more about Jessie. She lives about three blocks from us in a big ol' run-down apartment house. It's the only four story building in the whole neighborhood - maybe the whole town - and it's right next to the arroyo. And right next to it is an old run-down barn or somethin'. I'm not sure what it is, but nobody's lived in it for years 'cept the pigeons and some filthy old man everybody calls Miser. He walks around town carryin' a bag full of trash and he sleeps in that old barn, or whatever it is. Everyone says he's really rich, but he's just too cheap to spend his money, so he collects trash and sleeps there. All I know is the whole place smells like birdshit and so does Miser. Now, he's *esquiroso*!

But Jessie and her family, they ain't that bad. You wanna hear somethin' funny? You know what everybody calls the place where Jessie lives? The Castle. I guess just 'cause it's so big and it's made outta big grayish brown stones that are all rough and crumbly when you touch 'em. But that's about the only reason I can think of. 'Cause it's a dump. A plain ol' run-down dump. And just about everybody who ever lives there is

dirty. I mean kids with piojos in their hair and shit slidin' outta their diapers down their legs. Yecch! And you know what's even worse? I hate to say it, but I don't think nobody's ever lived there 'cept Mexicans.

We don't nave no black people in our town. So I guess the Mexicans are kinda like the niggers around here. 'Cept there's so many of us they can't treat us all like niggers. So I guess there's the Spanish people - like us - the ones that live in halfway-decent houses, and then there's the Mexicans. The dirty Mexicans. I guess Jessie and her family are the Mexicans. The dirty Mexicans. I've never been inside of their place - I wouldn't even think of it! But, you know, now that I think about it, Jessie really ain't that dirty. I mean, she don't stink or nothin' and her face is always clean. It's just that place she lives in. And her clothes. It looks like she gets 'em at the Salvation Army. I guess that's why we call her *Esquiroso*. But jeez! *Esquiroso*?

It seems like a whole day before Mama comes to the door. "Come an' eat," she says. She's still mad, I can tell. "An' don't forget to wash your hands."

"Mama? How come you got so mad at us? I looked up the word *esquiroso* in Gilbert's dictionary. It ain't no bad word or nothin'. Did you know there's no such word? It's really *asqueroso*. Did you know that?"

"Is that all you learned?" she says. She's still kinda mad.

So I tell her, "Well, no. I been thinkin'. I guess yer right, Ma. I was thinkin' about Miser. Would you say he's *esquiroso*?"

"Miser? Well, I don't know. I guess so. But you shouldn't tease him, either. He's prob'ly crazy. He can't help it if he's crazy."

"I guess not. But he's *esquiroso*, no? And some of those people that live in the Castle? With piojos an' all that?"

Mama turns red an' grabs my shoulder. Not hard, but kinda firm. Like she's got somethin' important to tell me.

"I know you're too young to remember, but you talk to Gilbert sometime. Or any of the older kids. They'll tell you what it's like to live in the Castle."

I'm so su'prised I don't know what to say! Then she looks at me kinda sad and kinda scared at the same time. "You just thank God you don't live there and pray that we never have to live there again!" I just know I'll never forget that.

Tomas Vallejos

## **THE DRIVE**

*Driven by maternity, I drove down the road toward a home.  
The keys were safely locked away, no need to use the locks  
today.*

*The road stretched on*

*Driven by one then by another, my windshield covered by rain,  
onward to that home, as mother, her loss would become their  
gain.*

*The road began to climb*

*Driven by a blinding tradition, My fuel begins to run low.  
Love has yet to see its passion. The keys, the locks, they know.*

*The road is rapidly descending*

*Diana Feld*

## **The White Horse**

*Oh, magical white Horse,  
Why did you take her away?  
With your crystalline beauty  
And your sensual touch  
You blinded and shackled her  
So that quickly she fell  
into your empyrean embrace.  
You swept her away  
Over abstract rainbows  
And withering lights,  
You promised her Heaven  
But Hell you gave.  
Still she went with you  
Through those wretched trails  
Of deadly intent  
Marked by broken arrows  
Left with fresh blood  
on their tips.  
Towards beautiful and invisible cliffs  
Not caring whether she lived or died,  
You rode on and on  
To fields of guile  
where things seemed easy  
in her comatose mind.  
But, because of the lifeless illusions  
Which she thought were better  
Than any concrete solutions,  
She fell and she drifted  
Into infinite sleep,  
Sleep which I  
Could not rouse.*

*Vainly she had clung to you  
On that last journey  
Over abstract rainbows  
And withering lights,  
which had now ended  
With an innocent Life.  
Didn't you see  
Vanishing White Horse  
That she was afraid  
that life would engulf her  
and make her bear*

*earth's*

*invisible*

*weight?*

*Santos Ocanas*

***Rural Louisiana***

*She stands, holding her child  
Straddled on her hip.  
Her scraggly hair is  
Held back by a yellow rubber band.  
She wears a thin, ragged cotton dress.  
The teenaged mother, with a smudged face,  
Waits outside in the dusty trailer park  
For her man to return  
In an old rusty pickup truck.*

*Phoebe Williams*



## ***The Tears Of The Victims***

*I cried from Goree  
In fever and chains,  
From Durban in the light  
Of a hut wreathed in flames*

*Do they weep at Robben Island?  
Are there tears in the Sahel?*

*A starving man's eyes  
Do not wander or tear  
They gimlet the sun  
With a wide open stare  
That augers past life  
And drills deeper than lies  
And the dying don't blink  
At duststorms or flies*

*If the tears of the victim  
Ever had an affect,  
It is something that science  
Has not defined yet.  
If the tears of the victims  
Were more infectious than art,  
Long ago human suffering  
Would have broken your heart.*

*Lorenzo Thomas*



## DEUS EX MACHINA

### (THE VERTICAL TUBE PROCESS)

Entwined, in darkness now, lie two  
of the fallen, sound asleep,  
who ground a clumsy pas de deux,  
and danced the silly dance of life.  
Each heard the guttural urges,  
undecipherable but meant,  
and felt the fingernail in flesh,  
the moaning plead to give relief  
and bring the sweaty tension's end.  
And from the waltz of waists were sent  
the million tiny messengers  
with wriggling tails and eyeless sense  
to swim the smooth, wet walls, intent  
on driving home the ancient code  
empatterned in their tiny heads.

VERTICAL TUBES ARE TUBES WITH TUBES  
SOME ARE TUBES WITH TUNNELS.  
VERTICAL TUBES MAKE TUBES FROM FLUID  
SQUEEZED INTO THEIR FUNNELS.

\* \* \*

For three full seasons now, the clump  
has sucked life from the golden cord,  
bumped along the vital wall and grown  
like a snowball down the hill, rolling  
and rolling, bug-eyed, silent,  
but soon to be the president,  
or someday Nobel laureate,  
yes, Jesus Christ(or nearly)by  
eviction from the silent sac.  
And with a SMACK!, the masked man's hand  
has cleared the lungs in spurts of phlegm  
and, held by feet, like blue meat, wet  
the self's proclaimed in primal scream.  
But, what then if the self screamed once  
and stayed so blue and never blushed  
and never heard the sudden hush  
that settled in the sterile room?

VERTICAL TUBES DON'T ALWAYS WORK  
WHEN THE TUBES ARE PARTED.  
SOME ARE KEPT IN PICKLE JARS,  
THE OTHERS ARE DISCARDED.

\* \* \*

The slant light of October falls  
in harsh defraction through the trees  
and marks the place in patterns where  
the frozen earth is freshly dug.  
And, to the realm of worm and slug,  
is tendered deep a little box,  
the culmination of those dreams,  
the Nobels, laurels, and salvation,  
speeches, parades, and (of course)  
our heartiest congratulations.  
Those who bear to witness, now,  
interment of our greatest scheme  
will mutter "Ave..." , "Pater..." near  
the little pit dug in the green.  
How vain the argument now seems,  
the point and proof have slipped away  
and all the mind can now recall  
are children's chants of other days.

VERTICAL TUBES CHURN DAY AND NIGHT  
AND PROCESS TO THE RAGE  
AND HUM OF THEIR MACHINERY,  
THE PLAINSONG OF THE AGE:  
NOGODNOGODWEAREALONE  
NOGODWEAREALONE!

Ian Edward Dix

## **In Need Of**

*I've reflected over it  
As others have before  
And, as others will, for sure.  
I muse over it  
During prime-time T.V.  
Or lonely nights  
When all is quiet,  
Or when shopping at the mall.  
The question is timeless.  
Politicians, grinning preachers,  
Death Row inmates,  
you name it, they've all asked it.*

*Christians say it's running out,  
A bum will say different  
If you have a dollar.  
Hell, just yesterday I asked it.  
Funny, how time ran out  
Before I even started  
On an answer.  
It was five of three,  
And it was ten minutes away.  
Time is just too short  
To be figuring out answers.*

*Today, there is no rush  
To find out the answer.  
There's tomorrow or  
Next week or next year.  
Today, there's no time to ask  
Questions without end.  
My paper is due  
And professors,  
Well, you know  
They have no time  
For empty questions  
When time is a concern to you.*

*Santos Ocanas*

## **Lovelle**

*Hindsight, as they say, is best,  
and looking back,  
I never really knew her.*

*Though I suppose, I thought I did,  
In those days I knew everything.*

*I did give lots of gifts,  
and cute little cards,  
promises not to hurt her.*

*I can't recall a single smile,  
As she unwrapped the packages.*

*Larry Harbison*

## **Late**

*6:45  
7-11  
Too early  
Tall slender red-haired  
dressed  
in professional garb  
her bare legs  
unshaved  
Sheer-to-waist  
medium-to-small  
nude  
sandlefoot  
\$1.89  
She works  
Maybe downtown  
Wonder where  
she  
puts them  
on*

*Denise Livings Wilborn*

### **Wiping The Sweeping Flood Of Her Tears**

*Wiping the sweeping flood of her tears,  
she asks him, "Where are you going?"  
He leaves her without a whisper  
while the waves roll in beneath a trembling sky.  
She looks out at the horizon with a sigh,  
taking a deep breath,  
smelling the salty odor of the sea  
carried to her by the rushing breeze.  
She sits alone,  
until something breaks her calm.  
He returns to her  
at the first blush of dawn.  
She asks, "Where have you been?"  
He says, "Where I should have been, with you,  
holding you within my arms and  
wiping the sweeping flood of your tears."*

Mark Stallman

### **I Do Not Think Of You**

You

*are palms, born for carving.*

*Ribbon,  
loose, in smoothed-back hair.  
This blouse's rise and falling,*

*running water, morning air.*

You

*are notes in absent humming  
to a coat draped on a chair.  
The sound of shoes becoming  
leaves, dead, upon my stair.  
One enwrapping*

*instance*

*too lost to be ensnared.  
Death in love. A moment.  
Clothes abandoned,  
souls so bare.*

You

*are...  
a sorcerer at my window,  
blackbirds waiting at my door  
that vanish with a whisper  
like ghosts in fields of corn.*

You

*see,*

*you are the darkness  
I dreamt of in a womb,  
that cuts my palms  
my restlessness,*

*my winter afternoons.*

Wendy Li

## **Morning (Thoughts)**

*(Is that the time?!! Oh, no!)  
I bolt out of bed knowing that  
I won't be eating breakfast, or  
Applying makeup, or  
Using the iron.  
I shiver after the shower  
That washed the bare minimum  
To save time.*

*(DAMMIT! Why do I save stockings that have  
Runs? Do I think that  
I will wear them again?)  
Cursing,  
I search for another pair.*

*With a lock of the key, I am  
Out of the house,  
Running.  
(Oh, good, car door is unlocked. That will  
Save time.)*

*Like a stunt driver, I race out  
Of the driveway.  
Cursing every slow thing in my way, I  
Watch for police cars that may be  
Watching me.  
(Oops, slow down, school zone.)*

*Suddenly,  
My foot instinctively lurches for  
The brake.  
(Why are you standing in the road?!  
Pinheads!  
You could get hit!)  
My hand readies for a  
Hornblast.  
Still, curious, I slow even more as  
I approach the crowd.*

*Passing, I gasp.  
Limply, my hand drops from  
The horn.*

*In a daze, I find my way to work.  
My timepiece gets an  
Unexpected rest.  
Eyes brimming,  
I think of  
Those people --  
Anxiously huddled over  
A dog.*

*Kelly Ballow*

## The Good Chance

It was raining with a gentle insistency on the Boulevard Chat Noir. Lights from the traffic were reflected in the wet surface of the street, and a patch of petrol shimmered in the gutter. Lingering lunchtime smells drifted from the now almost empty cafes to mingle with the exhaust fumes and the smell of the wet earth from the Luxemburg Gardens as it floated in soft gusts past the table where Yvette was sitting, under the blue awning of "Le Bon Chance."

Yvette was still a young woman. She lived by herself in a room on the top floor of an old house on the Left Bank. She worked as a guide in The "Gallerie des Impressionists" in the Place de la Concorde. Her friend, Marie, who also worked there, had arranged to meet one of the visitors she had been showing around, but she was unable to keep the appointment because her mother had come to visit her from Alsace a week earlier than planned. She asked Yvette if she would go instead, and Yvette had agreed.

Yvette signalled the waiter over, "Another glass of white wine, please."

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

A group of students walked by, talking and laughing among each other. As they passed by Yvette's table, one of the boys turned and smiled over his shoulder at her. She smiled back, and the feeling of poignancy left her for a moment. She thought how marvelous it must be to fall in love. It had never happened to her, but, as she frequently told herself, she was still young. Sometimes, as when the boy smiled at her, she was given a hint of it -- a twinge of excitement, a foreshadowing of the game that was waiting to be played.

A dark blue limousine swished to a standstill in front of the cafe. A chauffeur jumped out and held the door open for a small elderly man wearing a light grey suit, a black cashmere overcoat draped across his shoulders. He stepped onto the sidewalk and glanced around the tables. Yvette waved to him, and he walked over to her. "Good afternoon, Mademoiselle."

"Good afternoon," Yvette answered, "are you Monsieur Adam?"

"Indeed," the man bowed slightly.

"I am Yvette Blanche. I work with Marie. She was unable to meet you this afternoon and asked me to come in her place. I hope you don't mind."

"Why, thank you," the man smiled. "It is so kind of you to offer to keep an old gentleman company when I'm sure you would rather be doing something more exciting."

Yvette smiled, "No, not really."

"Well, we must endeavor to make this a beautiful day -- for myself as well as you." The man sat down carefully and ordered them both some wine. After the waiter had served them, he raised his glass, "To a beautiful day, then."

"Yes, a beautiful day." Yvette looked down at his hand as it rested on the table. It was small and narrow and well cared for. Suddenly, she felt a great warmth for him. For her, a person's hands always seemed to be the most sensitive part of them -- as if their whole essence lay in the shape and movement of them.

"Do you like shopping?" asked Monsieur Adam, and, without waiting for her reply, he carried on, "myself, I love to shop. I cannot resist the thought of something new. It elates me. But, unfortunately, the feeling does not last." He gazed at the cars as they splashed by. "Never mind, this afternoon we will go shopping. Please, finish your wine." He waived to the chauffeur who was flirting with the cashier across the zinc-covered counter top.

Yvette stood up. She could not tell this man that she loathed to shop. New things held a horror for her. They brought with them a sense of intrusion. But how could she refuse this gentle little man with his wistful smile.

They stepped into the limousine. Yvette inhaled a smell of cold leather and absolute cleanliness. She drew back, "Do you mind if we walk Monsieur?"

"Of course not. And please, Adam -- not Monsieur."

Yvette smiled with relief as he slipped his arm through her's. As they started walking toward the Boulevard Saint Michel, it was still only finely misting, although the sky was grey and heavy with rain. The sidewalk cafes lining the boulevard were empty except a couple which still had the awnings down and, under these, casual afternoon shoppers were watching the passers-by. The old bookstores looked warm and inviting; the doors open to show the shelves of books which, in fine weather, lined the sidewalks.

"When is your birthday, Yvette?"

"July the tenth."

"Then you are a Cancer?"

"Yes."

The man smiled to himself as he steered Yvette into a winding cobbled-stone side street. They stopped outside the window of a small jeweler's shop.

"You wait here, my dear. I shall only be a minute." He stepped into the shop, and the door bell clanged behind him. Yvette looked up and down the street. The gutters were clogged with garbage -- orange peels, old wine bottles and stained newspapers. Above, almost meeting over her head, the narrow houses seemed to be stretching their pointed roofs toward the dull sky, as if they were trying to claw themselves up out of their foundations.

Across the other side of the street was a tiny cafe. It was run by Arabs.

On the steamy window, a notice read "cous-cous". Suddenly, the door of the cafe was thrown open, and two men came out. They waved at Yvette, and she waved back. A smell of boiled vegetables and mutton enfolded her, and, through the open door, she saw the customers spooning their cous-cous from big earthenware bowls as they laughed and shouted across the street; the door of the cafe blew shut with a bang. She stepped back in front of the jeweler's window. Monsieur Adam came out, the shop bell clanging behind him. He took Yvette's hand in his and placed a large, smooth stone in her palm. Yvette stared at the rich, shimmering pool. "What is it?" she whispered.

"A ruby. Your birthstone." He gave a soft, excited laugh. "It's yours."

"Oh, I can't. Really, I can't," gasped Yvette.

"But you must," he insisted.

"It's too much--too expensive. I hardly know you."

"I didn't buy it for you because it was expensive. And we know each other enough for me to give you this."

"But why?"

"Because it is alive. You will see."

She looked at the quivering pool in her hand. Blood and fire.

"What shall I do with it?"

"Whatever you want; it is your birthstone," he laughed.

Yvette put the stone in her coat pocket, fearing that it might catch her on fire and burn her to death. The man took her arm again, and they walked further down the street. He stopped in front of a bowed window which was crammed to the ceiling with shoe boxes. "Would you mind if I went in here for a minute?" he asked. "It is the shop of a marvelous bootmaker, and I promised myself a new pair of boots the first time I met a pretty girl."

"Yvette smiled, "No I don't mind at all."

"One moment then please." He hurried eagerly inside.

As Yvette waited for him, once more she wished she could have got rid of the ruby. It still seemed to her like a torch that was lying in wait in her pocket, ready to engulf her in flames. The sky was almost black, and, although it was still barely raining, a strong wind had risen. The pieces of garbage and newspapers were being tossed in the gutters. A sudden gust of wind brought alive a pile of leaves and orange peels, whisking it into a small kaleidoscope. Yvette felt the grit rise up from the pavement and bit into her legs. She laughed out loud against the wind as a small grey cat dashed across the road to seek shelter in a covered alley.

After a few minutes, the man came out of the shop. He smiled broadly and pointed to his feet, which were encased in a pair of red leather cowboy boots with long, pointed toes and high heels. "Now I'm ready," he laughed.

Yvette looked at his glowing face and then at the new boots. Her throat started to ache. "Shall we go to my room?" she asked, "I'll make some soup or something."

He looked at her closely before answering, "Yes, I would like that."

They caught a taxi-cab which dropped them off in front of an old, six-storied house on the Rue Raspail. "I live on the top floor," said Yvette. "I'm sorry about the stairs." They passed by the concierge's window and started to climb. Halfway up, Yvette turned and waited for him to catch up. "Don't worry," he gasped as he reached her, "after all, I have on my new boots."

The first two flights of stairs were carpeted with a deep red runner, soft and thick to the touch. Ornate chairs were placed on each of the landings. On the third landing, the lush carpeting gave way to a dull brown matting, and the chairs were of plain, unpainted wood. Finally, as they approached the last flight of stairs leading to the sixth floor, the matting stopped and the floor boards were bare. The skylight in the roof above the landing let in a pale, luminous shaft of light. A faint smell of beeswax and cooking hung in the air. The man dragged himself up the last flight of stairs, hanging on the bannister for support. As they reached the door of Yvette's apartment, he sat gasping for air on the last step. She turned to him, keys in hand, and noticed, in the light above, the bald patches gleam under his baby fine hair.

"This is it," she said.

He reached out and took the keys from her, "Let me, my dear." The key would not turn in the lock and Yvette gently took it from him and opened the door.

II. The room was large, with a sloping roof and attic windows. A wooden bed stood under the windows, a red blanket folded across the foot of it. At the other end of the room, the low end, was placed a screen, behind which was a small gas ring and a cupboard that served as Yvette's kitchen.

"I'll heat the soup. Would you like some wine with it?"

"A glass of milk is really all I care for, if you have it," Adam answered.

Yvette poured out a glass of milk and handed it to him. "I shan't be a minute," she said, disappearing behind the screen. Picking up a robe, she changed out of her street clothes and put it on. It was dark pink and made of heavy satin. The yoke was embroidered with stitches sewn in the shapes of fruit and flowers. The left side was sleeveless and the right side had a short sleeve which hung down like the bell of a trumpet-vine blossom.

Yvette came out from behind the screen. Across the room, she saw the man had curled up on the bed and fallen asleep, his knees drawn up under his chin, the empty milk glass on the table next to him. She walked over and lifted the red blanket, spreading it over him, noticing, as she did, that he had wet himself. A sense of futility came over her. She moved back behind the screen, slipped out of the robe and slowly dressed herself. As she put her coat on, she felt with a shock the hardness of the stone in her pocket. Taking it out, she placed it on the pillow beside him. He smiled in his sleep as she bent over him and her hair brushed his face. Then, taking care not to trip over the neatly-placed cowboy boots, she walked softly across the room and let herself out into the pouring rain.

## **MOMENT REMAIN**

*I saw a tower...  
A water tower  
Simple...it works  
Easy...it pumps  
A reminder of a simple easy town  
A town I once loved  
A place I was alone  
Now I don't have much*

*I saw a tower...  
A water tower  
The people below it  
The ones above me*

*They love  
They hate  
People touch  
People touch me  
But so does that tower...  
Poor little water tower town*

*Joseph R. Williams*



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